ERN RAMPE

THE CANADIAN COUNCIL ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
LE CONSEIL CANADIEN DE DÉVELOPPEMENT SOCIAL

POLICY CONCEPTS

THE COOPERS & LYBRAND CONSULTING GROUP

Employability Resources Network

The Employability Resources Network (ERN) is a three-year demonstration project funded by Employment and Immigration Canada under the Innovations program.

ERN is the responsibility of three organizations: The Canadian Council on Social Development, The Coopers & Lybrand Consulting Group, and The Norton Group.

ERN's purpose is to explore and evaluate methods for helping unemployed people get off social assistance and back into the job market, through employability programs currently under way across Canada.

ERN will select at least 10 to 15 demonstration projects for an in-depth evaluation of the different approaches used to help social assistance recipients and others re-enter the labour force. It will assess the projects' effectiveness for different groups, such as older unemployed workers, women, native people, disabled persons, visible minorities and youth.

ERN will establish a standardized framework for evaluating employability enhancement projects. The framework will provide useful information not only for government policy-makers, but also for business, social service and employment agencies, and program administrators.

ERN will develop an information resource centre. It will include an inventory of national and international employment projects, an evalution data base and a documentation library. A communications network will serve organizations and individuals in the employment enhancement field.

The Employability Resources Network,
55 Parkdale Avenue,
Ottawa K1Y 1E5. Tel: (613) 728-1879.
Fax: (613) 728-9387.
Strategic Management Committee: Keith Norton, The Norton Group; Terrance Hunsley, CCSD; J.P. Herzog, Coopers & Lybrand Consulting Group
Contract Administration/Technical Support: Coopers & Lybrand Consulting Group (613) 237-3702
Communications: CCSD (613) 728-1865 and Media Concepts Communications (416) 486-1800
Information Resources: CCSD
Demonstration Evaluation: Coopers & Lybrand Consulting Group
Quebec Liaison: CCSD (514) 288-1687

Ressources pour l'amélioration des possibilités d'emploi

Le projet Ressources pour l'amélioration des possibilités d'emploi (RAMPE) est un projet témoin d'une durée de trois ans financé par Emploi et Immigration Canada dans le cadre du programme Innovations.

Trois organisations assument la responsabilité de RAMPE : le Conseil canadien de Développement social, Coopers & Lybrand Consulting Group et Le Norton Group.

Le mandat de RAMPE est d'explorer et d'évaluer, dans le cadre de programmes d'amélioration des possibilitiés d'emploi ayant cours dans l'ensemble du Canada, différentes formules pouvant aider les chômeurs à se soustraire à l'aide sociale et à réintégrer le marché du travail.

RAMPE sélectionnera dix à quinze projets témoins pour évaluer minutieusement les différentes stratégies favorisant la réinsertion des assistés sociaux et d'autres personnes sur le marché du travail. Il appréciera l'efficacité des projets visant différents groupes tels que les chômeurs d'un certain âge, les femmes, les autochtones, les handicapés, les minorités visibles et les jeunes.

RAMPE élaborera un schéma d'évaluation destiné aux projets d'amélioration des débouchés. Ce schéma fournira des renseignements utiles non seulement aux décideurs politiques du gouvernement, mais aussi aux entreprises, aux organismes de services sociaux et d'emploi, et aux administrateurs de programmes.

RAMPE créera également un centre national de documentation. Celui-ci comprendra l'inventaire des programmes d'amélioration des perspectives d'emploi mis en place au Canada et à l'étranger, une base de données sur l'évaluation et un centre de documentation. Un réseau de communication sera à la disposition des organismes et des particuliers qui s'occupent de l'amélioration des perspectives d'emploi.

Ressources pour l'amélioration des possibilités d'emploi, 55, avenue Parkdale, Ottawa K1Y 1E5.
Tél.: (613) 728-1879.
Télécopieur: (613) 728-9387.
Comité de gestion stratégique: Keith Norton, Le Norton Group; Terrance Hunsley, CCDS; J.P. Herzog, Coopers & Lybrand Consulting Group
Administration des contrats/support technique: Coopers & Lybrand Consulting Group (613) 237-3702
Communications: CCDS (613) 728-1865 et Media Concepts Communications (416) 486-1800
Ressources documentaires: CCDS
Évaluation des projets témoins: Coopers & Lybrand Consulting Group
Liaison au Québec: CCDS (514) 288-1687

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EMPLOYABILITY RESOURCES NETWORK

Report on the Evaluation Study of the

Halifax County Employment Resource Centre

FINAL REPORT

February, 1991

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Employability Resources Network
55 Parkdale Avenue
Ottawa, Ontario K1Y 1E5
Tel.: (613) 728-1879. Fax: (613) 728-9387

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Exhibit 1: **What Works for Whom**
Employment Resource Centre, Halifax, Nova Scotia. Clientele: Social Assistance Recipients (Able Bodied Unemployed, Sole Support Parents, Multiple Service Needs)

Intervention	**Output**	**Impact** (Leads to)	**Effect** (Result)	**Comments**
Counselling (Lifeskills, job search training)	To provide participants with employment counselling, lifeskills, job search training and other training specific to their needs.	Enhances employability and identifies training / educational opportunities	Employment or enrolment in training / education	Increases client commitment to program completion.
Marketing and Networking	To make ERC presence known and maintain inventory of community resources referrals of clients to other programs.	Increased awareness of ERC. Clients linked into existing employment / training programs	Effective coordination of services by ensuring access to services for clients in large service area	

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Conclusions

The Employment Resource Centre is an innovative approach in Canada and is successful in enhancing the employability of participants. The project has had some success in enabling survey respondents to obtain employment, and those who do are successful in maintaining employment. The ERC is successful in assisting participants to identify further training/education opportunities. The evaluation has found that the ERC has reduced reliance on social assistance for participants. Certainly, the ERC is successful in achieving its primary objective of assisting clients to make the transition to self-sufficiency.

The ERC's effectiveness is limited, somewhat, by barriers experienced by their clients (i.e. high need for literacy training in some areas, lifeskills needs, transportation, childcare) which are not directly addressed by the services currently available. However, the ERC has adopted a pro-active approach to providing the necessary services and any additions may enhance its effectiveness.

The evaluation attributes the ERC's success to the team approach taken by the social assistance division and ERC staff. Both work together in order to enable social assistance recipients to work towards self sufficiency. Key to this cooperation is the fact that social assistance recipients participate in the project immediately upon applying for benefits. The rationale is that they will be less dependent on the system if they are involved with ERC from the outset. By acting as a referral centre, rather than a service provider, the project has developed a unique response to their geographic and economic situation which results in an effective coordination of Halifax County's services at a relatively low per capita cost of $429.22.

For this reason, the ERC project is an interesting model for municipalities that are financially strapped. Exhibit 1, on the opposite page, depicts the project's interventions, outputs, impact and effects.

Program Description

The Halifax County Employment Resource Centre (ERC), is a project that aims at developing self-sufficiency among social assistance recipients. The Centre acts as a referral centre and provides on-going counselling rather than being a direct service provider.

Exhibit 2: Evaluation Issues and Conclusions

	Issues	Conclusions Suggested by the Evaluation
1.	Did the Program assist the participants in obtaining employment; or maintaining employment?	The project had some success in enabling survey respondents to obtain employment. 49% were employed at some time after the project. The project assisted participants by identifying further training / educational opportunities. Sixty-five percent of employed participants continued in their first job.
2.	Did the Program end or reduce social assistance?	Yes. Social assistance payments dropped from a mean of $740.94 per month to $241.46 after the project for a reduction of $499.48. An unintended impact of ERC may be that participants shift dependence to UIC.
3.	Did the Program strengthen the participants' personal sense of employment readiness?	Yes.
4.	Did the Program improve the participants' financial situation?	No. Only 37% reported an improvement. This is linked to the fact that one third of participants were pursuing further training and inflation effects. Mean annual income dropped to $9,889 after the project from $10,531 before the project.
5.	What were the costs of the Program compared to social assistance?	The per capita cost of the ERC is $429.22. Less than one month is required to recoup the cost of a session in terms of social assistance payments.
6.	What interventions contributed most to increasing employability?	The two services perceived as most helpful in contributing to employability were résumé preparation assistance and job search techniques. Job finding clubs were viewed as less helpful by participants, but reduced their sense of isolation and increased their commitment to finding employment.

Successful clients obtain employment or pursue further training / education opportunities.

The logic model in Appendix I depicts the objectives, activities, outputs, impacts and effects as developed during the evaluation assessment.

Clientele

The ERC was established originally to assist the able bodied unemployed in their transition from assistance to employment. Over the pilot phase, ERC staff recognized that other social assistance recipients could also benefit from the program. Accordingly, the ERC expanded its target groups to include single parents and individuals with multiple service needs (i.e. physical handicaps, employment barriers etc.). For this latter group, the emphasis is placed on addressing their particular needs, with employment a secondary or long-term goal. Individuals can become involved with the ERC from the time they first apply for social assistance. The ERC is open to all males and females and there are no age criteria in place.

Operation

After a thorough assessment of client needs, the counsellor and client jointly develop an action plan. The plan is implemented by referral of the client to external or internal services, or a combination of both. In order to reinforce the client's commitment to the action plan, regular progress meetings are held between the counsellor and client to review progress on the plan. There is no time limit for a client's participation.

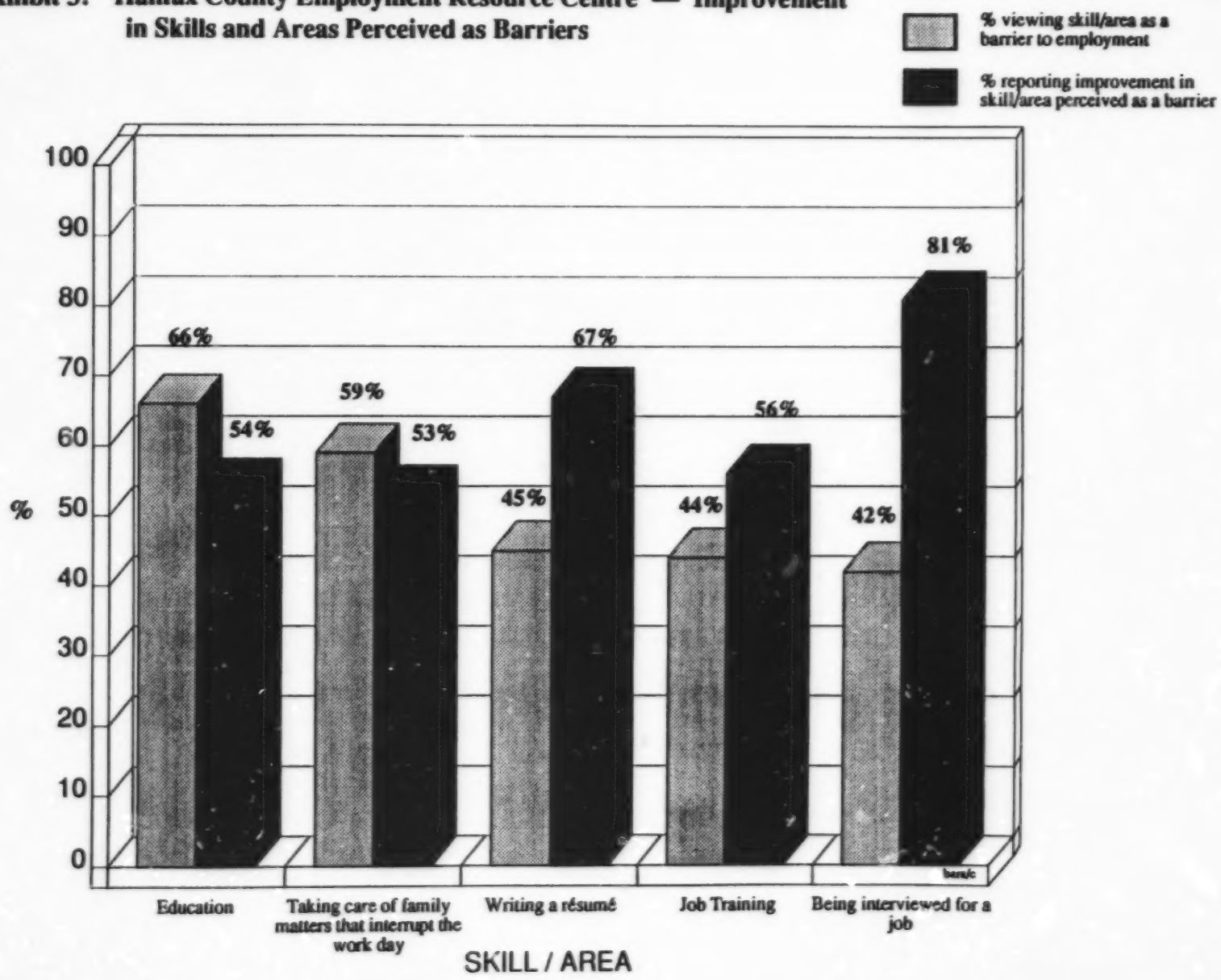
Services offered directly through the ERC consist of individual client counselling including lifeskills counselling and job search techniques, the co-ordination of Job Finding Clubs and single parent counselling. Employment counsellors work on a one-to-one basis with their clients out of the three County offices, as well as on an outreach basis so that client access to training is not jeopardized by location.

Issues and Findings

Six issues, developed during the evaluation assessment, were examined in evaluating the ERC. They are listed, along with the conclusions suggested by the data collected, in Exhibit 2 on the opposite page.

1. The Halifax County ERC has some success in enabling survey respondents to find employment (49% were employed at some point after the project) but those who do find employment are successful in maintaining employment (65% continue in their first jobs). The ERC is successful in assisting participants to identify appropriate training / educational opportunities. The ERC also stabilized participants'

Exhibit 3: Halifax County Employment Resource Centre — Improvement in Skills and Areas Perceived as Barriers



employment patterns, in particular reducing reliance on seasonal employment.

2. The project reduced dependence on social assistance as the primary source of income. Social assistance payments dropped from $740.94 to $241.46 after the project for a reduction of $499.48. For some respondents dependence may have shifted to unemployment insurance, an unintended effect of the project.

3. The Halifax County ERC resulted in an improved sense of employment readiness for most participants. For skills perceived as barriers to employment the project was most successful in improving two specific skills: being interviewed for a job; and writing a résumé. The constant support provided by ERC staff was a key factor in increasing a participant's job readiness. Lack of work experience was viewed as a barrier by 40% of respondents but work placements were not formally offered by the ERC. Exhibit 3, on the opposite page, depicts the five main areas seen as barriers.

4. The ERC did not result in any improved financial situation for participants. Only thirty-seven percent of respondents reported that their financial situation had improved. This figure is low because respondents involved in training / educational projects likely did not experience any positive change in their situation and is also attributable to inflation effects. Mean annual income dropped to $9,889 after the project from $10,531 before the project.

5. The per capita cost of the ERC is $429.22. Less than one month is required to pay for a session in terms of social assistance payments.

6. The two services perceived as most helpful in contributing to employability were résumé preparation assistance and job search techniques. Job finding clubs were viewed as less helpful by participants, but reduced participants' sense of isolation and increased their commitment to finding employment. Exhibit 4, overleaf, depicts the services viewed as most helpful.

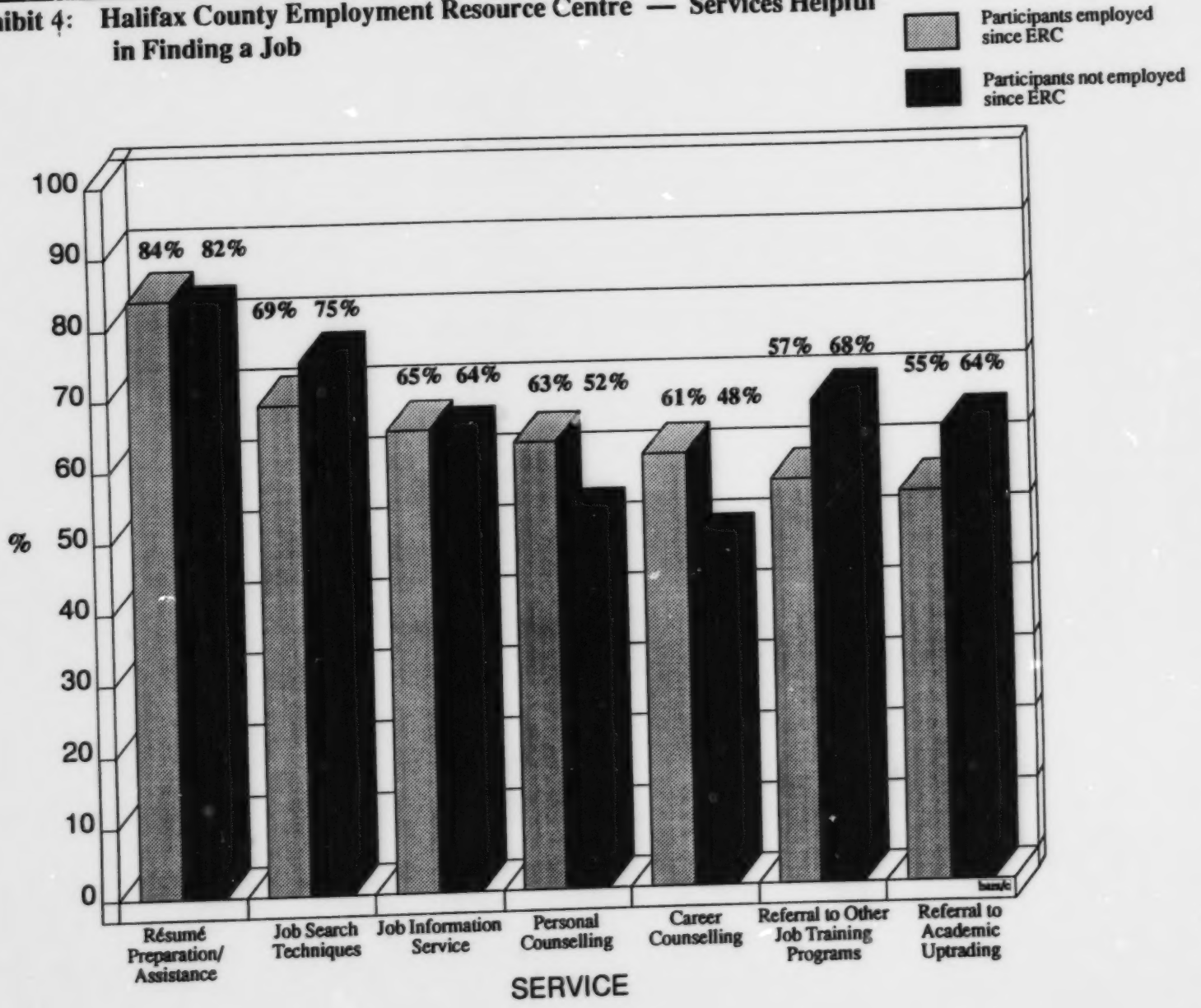
Recommendations

Against these findings, we make the following recommendations which are intended as enhancements of the ERC. We recognize that some of our recommendations are beyond the control of project management, but suggest their inclusion in future funding proposals.

Federal/Provincial Governments:

1. The approach taken by the Employment Resource Centre in facilitating the transition of social assistance recipients from dependency to self-sufficiency should continue to be supported by the SARS program

Exhibit 4: Halifax County Employment Resource Centre — Services Helpful in Finding a Job



and project management. This approach recognizes that the transitional period translates into varying amounts of time for different individuals, and does not pressure ERC staff to push clients into any kind of employment in order to reduce numbers on the social assistance caseload. Success of this project should be measured in terms of the number of participants employed or pursuing further educational / training opportunities.

2. A related recommendation is that the ERC and similar employment enhancement projects be given an explicit mandate to include "quality of life" objectives in their overall employment objective. This recommendation is based on the realization that a high proportion of ERC clients have multiple barriers and are not ready for employment in the short term; but require counselling or pre-employment training to make them job ready.

Project Designers:

3. The ERC has been well integrated into the existing structure of the County Social Assistance System. ERC and social assistance staff work on a team basis with clients and strong communication links preclude disagreements over clients' eligibility for benefits. It is strongly recommended that this team approach be used as a model by similar employment projects.

Specifically for this Project:

4. The evaluation has found that in some areas of Halifax County, as high as 40% of the ERC's clients require literacy training. To meet this need, we recommend that ERC project management take a proactive approach to this issue and act as an advocate for the establishment of formalized, literacy programs.

5. Lack of work experience has been identified as a barrier to employment by a large proportion of clients. We recommend that the project's officers target this need during the development of the action plan and make the appropriate referrals.

6. The job finding clubs can be enhanced by drawing from Halifax City's Employment Support Centre (ESC) where such clubs are highly successful. We recommend that project management consult Halifax City Employment Support Centre staff and use its clubs as a model for increasing the effectiveness of the Halifax County Employment Resource Centre's own job finding clubs.

7. We recommend that the ERC pursue its efforts to obtain the services of a trained lifeskills worker.

Lessons Learned

This evaluation was not conducted in isolation, but was carried out as part of a series of evaluations under the auspices of the Employability Resources Network (ERN).

The evaluation highlighted the utility of the ERC as a model for financially strapped municipalities serving populations spanning a large geographic area. By acting primarily as a referral centre, projects such as the ERC can result in the effective coordination of what is often a "patchwork" of highly useful, yet disjointed services being funded by an already taxed system. In assuming such a networking role, the effectiveness of all services is enhanced. In addition, social assistance clients often do not make effective use of the existing resource base and projects such as the ERC increase client awareness and use of available services in or near their own community.

1.
INTRODUCTION

The Halifax County Employment Resource Centre is an "employment readiness" program, which has been evaluated under the auspices of the Employability Resources Network (ERN) Initiative. This report, prepared by The Coopers & Lybrand Consulting Group which also conducted the evaluation assessment, presents the results of the evaluation study of the Halifax County Employment Resource Centre.

Purpose of the Study

An evaluation assessment of the Halifax County Employment Resource Centre was completed in December, 1989.

Consistent with The Coopers & Lybrand Consulting Group (CLCG) and ERN approach to carrying out evaluation activities, this assessment provided the basis for the evaluation study which was conducted between February and April. 1990.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate what interventions aimed at enhancing employability work best for particular types (e.g. the able bodied unemployed) of participants. Six evaluation issues were examined to answer this question.

Evaluation Objectives

Pursuant to the Evaluation Assessment and a decision by the ERN Evaluation Steering Committee, the issues that were addressed in the evaluation study (together with anticipated quality of data) are contained in Exhibit 1 below.

Exhibit 1:

COVERAGE OF ISSUES BY OPTION FOR THE EVALUATION OF THE HALIFAX COUNTY EMPLOYMENT

ISSUES	DATA COVERAGE
1. Did the project assist the participants in: - obtaining employment - maintaining employment	H
2. Did the project end/reduce the participants' dependence on social assistance?	H
3. Did the project strengthen the participants' personal sense of employment readiness?	H
4. Did the project improve the participants' financial situation?	H
5. What were the costs of the program compared to social assistance?	L
6. What interventions contribute most to increasing employability?	M

Coverage:
H = High
M = Medium
L = Low

More explicit details concerning the foregoing issues with accompanying research questions, indicators and data sources are contained in Appendix II to this report. A Technical Appendix, under separate cover, includes statistical tables.

Structure of the Report

This report is structured in the following manner:

- **Background**
  - Mission statement, objectives and benefits of ERN initiative.
  - Halifax County Employment Resource Centre objectives and a brief description of the Halifax County Employment Resource Centre operations/activities.
- **Study Design**
  - Describes how the data for the evaluation study research were collected and analyzed.
- **Facts, Findings and Conclusions**
  - Outlines for each evaluation issue and research question the salient facts, findings and conclusions reached.
- **Recommendations**
  - Outlines the recommendations arising from our facts, findings and conclusions.
- **Conclusion**
  - Provides an overall conclusion to the study.

Appendix III supplies the survey questionnaire, and interview guides relating to this evaluation.

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank Mr. Ian MacArthur, Coordinator of the Halifax County Employment Resource Centre, for providing his perspective on the project. We would also like to thank Mr. Geoff Strople, Research and Development Officer with the Halifax County Department of Social Services for his assistance in providing information from the database and his input regarding the cost savings calculations. Special thanks to the ERC Counsellors whose participation during interviews provided valuable qualitative information. Finally we would like to thank the participants of the project who took the time to attend the focus group or respond to the telephone survey.

2.
BACKGROUND

Mission Statement of Employability Resources Network (ERN)

The Employability Resources Network (ERN) was undertaken to identify and promote effective ways of helping employment disadvantaged persons return to active participation in the labour market.

Objectives of ERN

The objectives of ERN are the following:

- To determine, through a comprehensive evaluation of a variety of initiatives, what approaches to enhancing the employability of disadvantaged workers, work best for whom.

- To demonstrate and test, using financial and technical assistance, approaches that are vital to enhancing the employability of disadvantaged workers.

- To develop and maintain a central information clearinghouse of employability enhancement techniques and materials. Contained in the clearinghouse are descriptions of Canadian and international projects and programs, contact people, evaluations and bibliographies.

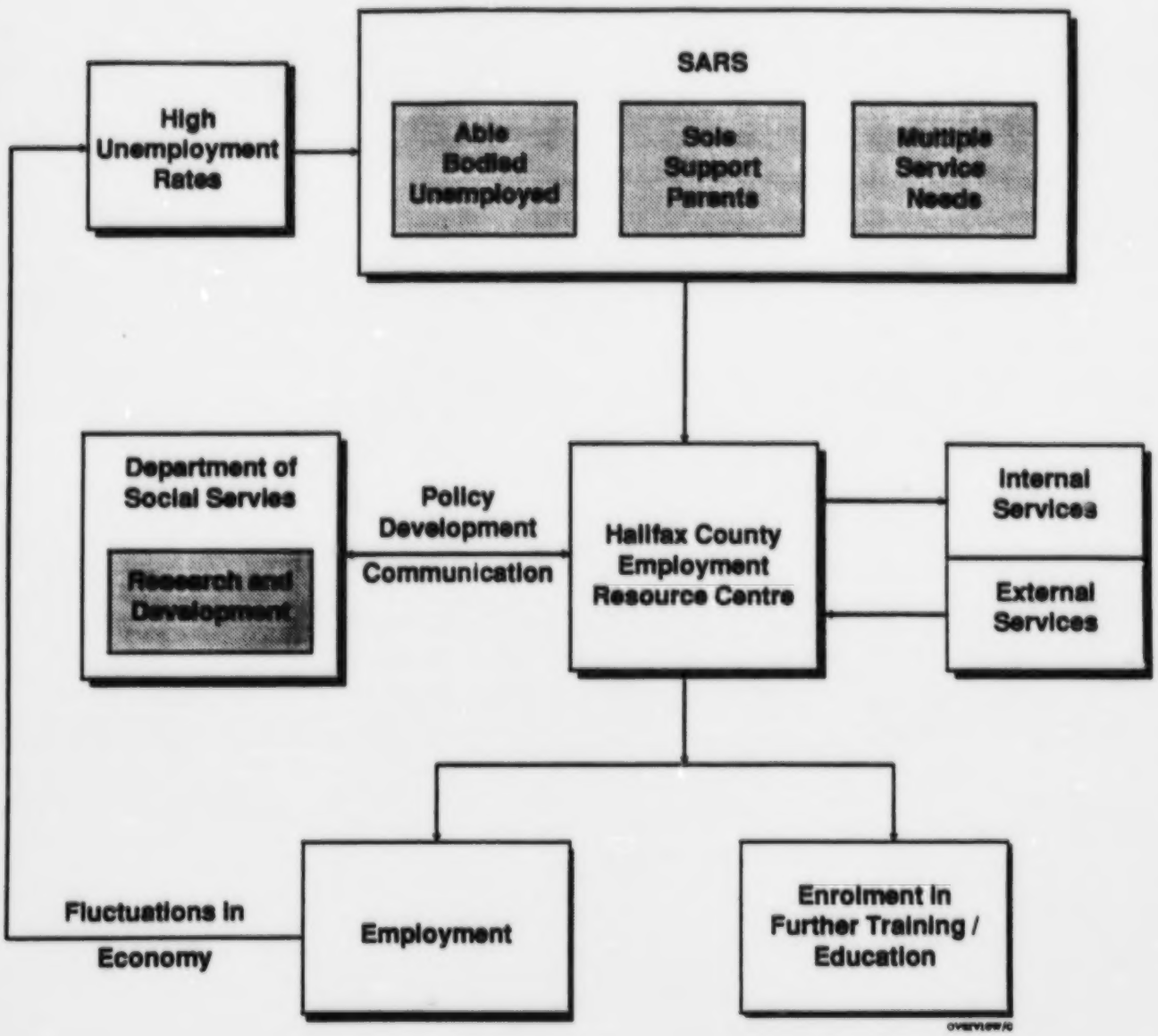
- To synthesize recent experience and recommend to the Minister of Employment and Immigration (funder) and other governments, effective approaches for enhancing the employability of disadvantaged workers.

Benefits of ERN

ERN has been designed to provide a "return" in the form of information and assistance to key stakeholders. They include Employment and Immigration Canada, other labour market or social service departments, projects being evaluated and demonstration projects, as well as communities, groups and individuals working or interested in the training and human resource development areas.

- Projects being evaluated will benefit from the objective examination of their services and outcomes for participants. Where appropriate,

Exhibit 2 — Overview of the Halifax County Employment Resource Centre



suggestions for alternate approaches or changes will be made.

- Senior governments will receive a synthesis of findings from evaluations, literature review and contacts with the employment community that will help in policy formulation and program development.

- Interested parties will also have access to a national clearinghouse of information on employment projects, programs, contact persons, and evaluations that will help in preparing funding submissions and in improving the quality of their services.

- Selected demonstration projects will be assisted to test innovative approaches.

Overview of Halifax County Employment Resource Centre - Operations and Activities

Using the Social Assistance Recipient Program (SARS), the Halifax County Municipality has designed a project aimed at developing self-sufficiency among social assistance recipients. The Halifax County Employment Resource Centre incorporates a team approach in which employment counsellors are hired to work with existing social assistance workers to help clients make the transition from social assistance to employment. Exhibit 2, on the opposite page, presents a diagrammatic view of the project.

At present the Halifax County Employment Resource Centre has a staffing complement of six employment counsellors (two of whom are single parent workers), two clerical staff and one program coordinator. Research support and advice on matters relating to policy development are provided through the Research and Development Office of the municipality's Department of Social Services.

Flexibility has been a key characteristic of the Halifax County employability project. The Employment Resource Centre was established primarily to assist the able bodied unemployed in their transition from assistance to employment. Over the pilot phase, however, ERC staff recognized that a significant proportion of the social assistance caseload who fell outside this target group, namely single parents, could also benefit from the program. Accordingly, when the program was expanded in September, 1988, the position of single parent counsellor was created. While many individuals in this client group may not be prepared to accept employment in the short-term because of family responsibilities, it was realized that their involvement in training and education programs, as well as individual counselling, could help prepare them for future employment. The single parent category includes both males and females, although currently males make up only 6% of the single parent category.

The Employment Resource Centre also includes persons with multiple service needs, (i.e. physical handicaps, employment barriers) even though some realistically may never be able to assume the responsibilities of full-time employment. For this client group the emphasis is placed on addressing their particular needs, with employment a secondary or long-term goal.

Under the Halifax County SARS model, an individual can become involved in the Employment Resource Centre from the time they first apply for social assistance. This is in contrast to the Halifax City SARS project which require clients to have received social assistance for a minimum of three months before involvement with the project. (This requirement, while in effect at the time of the evaluation, has not existed for the last 1-1/2 years). This early involvement was built into the Halifax County model to ensure that clients do not lose initiative and self-esteem, as is often the case when individuals remain on assistance for any length of time.

When an individual applies for assistance, the social assistance worker explains the ERC concept, does an initial assessment of the client's suitability for the program and completes a referral form on the client. The case worker then passes this referral form over to an employment counsellor, located in the same office, who in turn contacts the client for an individual appointment, completes an information form and obtains the client's consent to participate in the program. During a second appointment, additional information is obtained for a thorough assessment and the counsellor and client jointly develop an action plan. This action plan sets out objectives for the client's involvement in the program. The employment counsellor who performs the assessment stays with the client throughout his/her time with the ERC program thereby simplifying the communication process for the client.

The assessment takes the form of an employability rating based on such factors as job experience, education, mental/physical disabilities, financial obligations, motivation and communication skills, availability of transportation, daycare requirements and other factors which may enhance or inhibit employability. The client and counsellor discuss the assessment, set realistic goals related to training/upgrading and employment, and develop an action plan to achieve those goals. The action plan, and the client's role in developing that plan, are seen as central to the success of the Employment Resource Centre. In order to reinforce the client's commitment to the action plan and thereby enhance the possibility for success, regular progress meetings (bi-weekly at minimum) are held between the counsellor and client to review progress on the plan. Although there is no set time for a client's involvement with the program, all action plans are reviewed after three months and the progress of the client is assessed. Revisions are made as required.

In implementing the action plan, the employment counsellor may recommend services run directly out of the Employment Resource Centre, services operated by other community organizations within the metropolitan region or some combination of internal and external services.

Should the clients not make their initial appointment with the counsellor, the counsellor contacts them for a second appointment. If the second appointment is broken, the case worker is informed and, in turn, contacts the client to determine what steps are being taken to obtain employment. While participation in the program is voluntary, municipal policy requires able bodied clients to demonstrate efforts to obtain employment. Accordingly, individuals classified as able bodied unemployed who refuse to take part in the ERC and who make no effort to seek employment on their own, may become ineligible for social assistance.

Services offered directly through the ERC consist of individual client counselling including life skills counselling and job search techniques, of Job Finding Clubs, and single parent counselling. Employment counsellors work on a one to one basis with their clients out of the three County social assistance offices as well as on an outreach basis to the most remote communities of the County to minimize locational disadvantages.

While work placements are not a formal service offered through the Employment Resource Centre, clients are often put in touch with potential employers identified through the Employment Resource Centre's marketing activity.

Networking is an equally important function of Employment Resource Centre staff. In instances, for example, where a need such as alcohol, drug, or mental health counselling is identified, the counsellor puts the client in touch with the appropriate agency while maintaining contact with the client through their regular meetings. The staff also make extensive use of training/employment related workshops or Job Finding Clubs put on by other organizations in the metropolitan area, referring clients where appropriate.

This strategy of combining basic job skills services and on-going counselling with a networking function was developed by Employment Resource Centre staff in response to their geographic and economic situation. The largest municipality in Atlantic Canada, Halifax County is responsible for a population of approximately 140,000 spread across a primarily rural landbase roughly the size of Prince Edward Island. In recent years, the areas adjacent to Halifax-Dartmouth have seen a large population increase which has meant growing social assistance caseloads without a corresponding increase in the economic base. The networking aspect of the Employment Resource Centre is designed to enable staff to link their clients into the metropolitan area's greater employment/training resource base and is intended to be a cost-

effective way of serving their social assistance clients.

Since January 1989 approximately 600 clients have received supportive services of the Employment Resource Centre with 35% finding employment and an additional 25% enroled in further training or academic upgrading. A further 15% have left the program due to relocation or other reasons, and the remaining 25% are still in the program. It should be noted that clients enter the ERC on an ongoing basis.

The ERC 1989 budget was approximately $255,000 with $190,000 provided by SARS funding and remainder by Halifax County.

3.
STUDY DESIGN

The study design consisted of multiple lines of evidence including:

- telephone survey of participants;
- program data collected by ERC staff at intake on the client data form;
- a focus group held with 10 clients of the Employment Resource Centre (ERC); and
- in-person interviews conducted with four employment counsellors, one social assistance worker, the district supervisor for social assistance, the ERC coordinator and the General Assistance Supervisor for Halifax County.

Methodological Considerations

When reviewing this report it is important that the reader bear in mind that the survey sample is small in size and was not randomly selected. Therefore, the findings can not be said to be representative of the ERC population. Caution is also warranted when interpreting financial data since this information is subject to recall errors. With this in mind however, as evaluators we attempt to present a balanced report of the survey results, supplemented with the more qualitative outcomes from staff and participant interviews and a participant focus group. In so doing, we reported general patterns that emerged from the qualitative methods.

Telephone Survey of Participants and Program Data

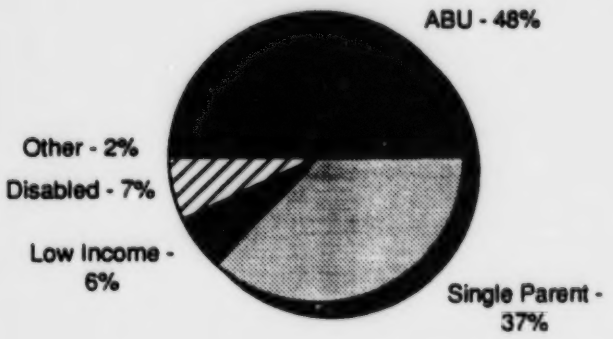
The client data form gathered demographic information about clients, some pre-project income assistance data, assessment information (i.e. disability) and some post-project data. Consequently, the issues for evaluation were not directly addressed by data collected by the Halifax County ERC project management. Accordingly, a major methodology for this evaluation was a telephone survey of participants. A decision was taken to survey participants who were active with the ERC in 1989 only. The total participant population for this period was approximately 600 clients. It should be noted that the list of 1989 ERC clients provided by the ERC inadvertently included some clients who were not active in 1989 and some clients who, although referred to the ERC and

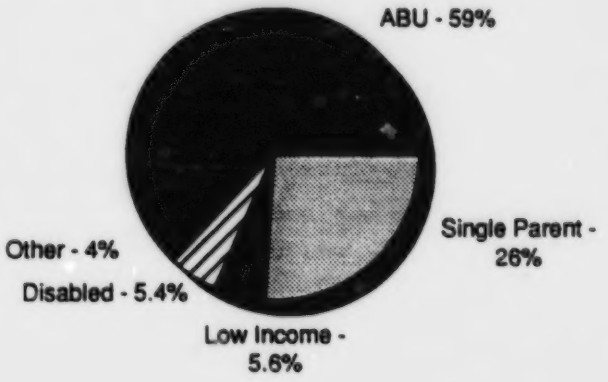
Exhibit 3: Halifax County ERC — Characteristics of Telephone Survey — Respondents and ERC Client Population

Respondents (n=127)

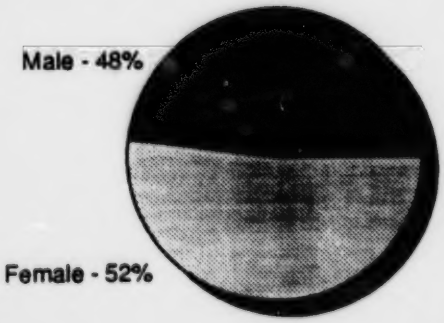
Client Population (n=630)

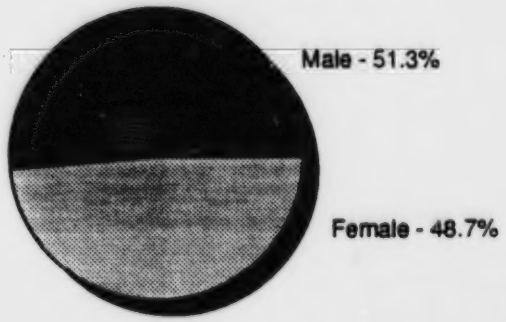
Client Category



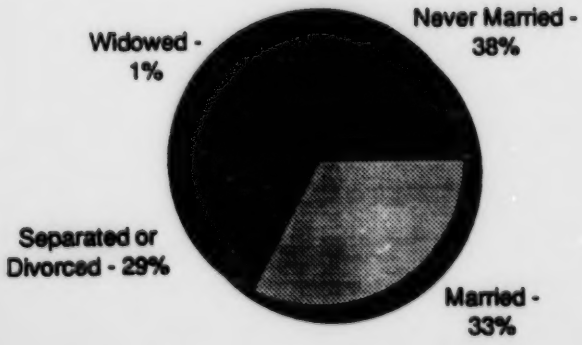


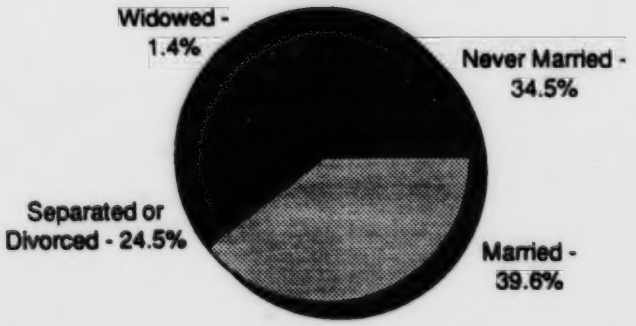
Gender





Marital Status





scheduled for appointments, were not actually seen. As a result, a sampling frame of 750 clients was sent to ERN when in fact only 592 clients were active in 1989. Approximately 50 clients selected for telephone interviews were not actual 1989 clients for whom project data was available. This explains why demographic information was available for only 127 of the 154 survey respondents.

All participants were contacted and quotas were established for completed interviews. When conducting the survey, telephone numbers were available for 750 participants. The interviewers were instructed to call back at least five times and to trace any telephone numbers that were no longer correct. One hundred fifty-four (154) participants were contacted and consented to a telephone interview. Accordingly, this evaluation presents findings based on these 154 respondents.

Exhibit 3, on the opposite page, highlights a comparison of selected demographic characteristics and is simply intended to provide the reader with a "snapshot" of the sample and population when reviewing this report. It should be noted that single parents are somewhat over-represented as a group which may be a result of the fact that child care responsibilities make it difficult for this group to obtain employment and thus easier to contact by telephone since they tend to be in the home. This factor should be kept in mind when examining Issue 1.

The data collected by Halifax County ERC project management provided basic "tombstone" data on all participants. Information included demographic characteristics.

Focus Group and In-person Interviews

In order to obtain insight into the impact of the project on the individual participants, a focus group was held with 10 clients of the ERC. Interviews were also held with project and agency staff to obtain their perspective on the project's strengths and weaknesses as a training and employment mechanism.

Measuring Project Success

The primary objective of the Employment Resource Centre, as we have seen, is "to facilitate the transition of social assistance recipients from dependency to self-sufficiency." In implementing this objective, it is important to realize that the ERC does not work only with those individuals who are job ready, but also those who have very limited job prospects in the short-term and some who realistically may never work on a full-time basis. Although in a practical sense "self-sufficiency" means employment for the majority of clients, a philosophy of self-development underlies the Employment

Resource Centre so that for some participants, success may mean improvement in their quality of life rather than employment.

The ERC takes into account that the transitional process from dependence on social assistance to self-sufficiency translates into varying amounts of time for different individuals. Some individuals, those who would be classified as job ready, may only require short-term involvement in a job finding club or career counselling on a one-on-one basis. Others, who may have only a grade 8 reading level, and a history of sporadic employment due to substance abuse may require some form of contact with the ERC for a year or longer. The single parent raising two or three small children alone may not realistically be able to consider full-time employment until the children are of school age; however involvement with the ERC can lead to an improved self-image, more effective parenting and coping skills, educational upgrading and even some skills training.

Employment then, is just one output of a client's involvement with the ERC. An enhanced self-image, better coping skills, literacy training, substance abuse counselling - these are often the first steps to getting on the road to self-dependence. In assessing the success of the Employment Resource Centre this broader approach to self-sufficiency, one that looks at the whole individual and their life situation rather than solely their employment status, was used by the evaluators. However, since a primary objective of funders is the enhancement of the ERC client's employability, we focused on the ERC's success with respect to this objective.

4.
FACTS, FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Findings and Conclusions

This section presents our findings and conclusions with respect to each of the six evaluation issues. The assessment issues were established during the evaluation assessment. Appendix II describes the research questions, indicators and data collection tools associated with each issue.

ISSUE 1

Did the Project assist participants in:

- **obtaining employment;**
- **maintaining employment?**

Conclusion

The Halifax County ERC is successful in meeting its primary objective in assisting individuals make the transition from social assistance to employment. A total of 49% of ERC clients were employed after their involvement with the project. Project information indicated that 65% of respondents were either employed or involved in some form of training through their participation with ERC. The ERC then, is successful in enabling participants to find employment or identify appropriate training opportunities. Sixty-five percent of participants continued in their first job. ERC also stabilized participants' employment patterns, reducing reliance on seasonal employment in particular.

Issue Focus

This issue addresses the primary goal of all employability enhancement projects, that is whether a participant's employment potential is improved. For this particular project, "employment potential" can be measured by examining whether participants exhibit a better employment history after participation in the Halifax County ERC.

Before evaluating the Halifax County ERC we had to define what constitutes a "success". As we have seen in our discussion under "Measuring Project Success", employment is just one effect of the ERC. In assessing the success of this project, the Employment Centre's broader approach to self-sufficiency, one that looks at the whole individual and their life situation rather than only their employment status, was considered.

Findings

How many participants subsequently found work?

All participants were recipients of social assistance prior to beginning the project.

Employment: Results from the telephone survey indicate that 32% (50) of respondents were employed at the time of the survey. In addition, another 25 respondents indicated that they had been employed at some time since their involvement with the ERC, for a total of 49% who indicated some employment (present and past) since being involved with the ERC.

At first glance, these figures seem low. It should also be noted that 37% of the participants were single parents compared to 26% of the ERC population. This over-representation has probably skewed the employment/training figures because this group focus child care responsibilities as an additional barrier to employment. In fact 27 (34%) of the 80 respondents who were single parents reported that they were employed at the time of the survey, and an additional 12 indicated they had been employed at sometime since the program. However, since employment is not the only objective for ERC clients, we examined project data to determine whether participants enroled in further training through their involvement with the ERC.

Educational Training or Upgrading: Project information was available for 127 participants regarding the outcome of their involvement with the ERC. Twenty-seven (27) participants were still active with the project. A further 26% (33) were referred to various educational or upgrading programs: 26 entered a training program, 4 went on for academic upgrading, 2 entered sheltered workshops and one enroled in part-time education. Excluding the 27 participants involved with the ERC, the result is that a total of 65% of these participants were employed or involved in some form of training through their participation in the ERC.

These results are similar to project outcomes for the 750 clients who have received ERC services. Seventy percent of these clients found employment or enroled in further training or academic upgrading.

These findings indicate that the ERC counsellors have successfully developed a case plan in concert with the clients that points them in directions that they may not have previously considered. An example of this was provided through the focus group discussion. One individual, trained as a carpenter, and accustomed to seasonal and sporadic employment, had joined the ERC caseload as a means of supporting his family. His situation was compounded by an illness that led him to question his ability to continue his trade in the future. Through discussions with an ERC counsellor, the client was made aware of other career possibilities and is embarking on a four year study to

become a program to become a construction administrative technologist.

A second example concerns a single parent who had owned and operated her own hair salon for 10 years. Due to an injury she was unable to continue working in this field and was forced to rely on social assistance. Her involvement with the ERC provided her with encouragement and financial support to pursue a second career in the nursing profession.

How many successful participants maintained employment?

Since their involvement with the project 65% (49) of respondents who found jobs have continued in their first job and 24% (18) continued in their second job. Very few participants who were employed at some time after their involvement with the project held three or more jobs (10.7%). Respondents were employed for a mean of 5.2 months after the project with 24% employed 6 months or more. ERC clients are successful in maintaining their employment.

Is there a change in employment pattern for successful participants?

A comparison was possible based on information about participants' employment history before beginning the project. Pre-and post-project employment information was available for 127 respondents.

Over half (53.6%) were employed full-time, 25.9% were employed on a part-time basis and 19% were employed seasonally. Thirty-nine of these respondents were employed at the time of the telephone survey and another 22 were employed at some time since their involvement with the ERC. In contrast, very few of these respondents were employed seasonally (4.9%) at their first job. Most were employed on a full-time (60.7%) or part-time (34.4%) basis. A comparison of reasons for the termination of employment did not reveal any differences before and after participation with the ERC.

The preceding discussion indicates that the employment pattern of participants did stabilize after their involvement with the ERC. A net total of 18 (3 vs. 21) less participants were employed in seasonal jobs after their involvement with the project. Participants demonstrate a stable employment pattern and a reduced reliance on seasonal employment.

ISSUE 2

Did the Project end/reduce the participant's dependence on social assistance?

Conclusion

The project did reduce dependence on social assistance as the primary source of income. Social assistance payment reduced from 740.94 per month before the ERC to $241.46 for a difference of $499.48. However, for some respondents the project may indirectly have had the

unintended effect of shifting their dependence to unemployment insurance.

Issue Focus

Another goal of employability enhancement projects is to enable participants to end their dependence on assistance. When we evaluated this issue for Halifax County ERC, we considered not only whether participants were on assistance, but whether their reliance on assistance as a source of income changed or shifted. For instance, a client may still receive social assistance, but at a lower level than before a project. In addition, a client may have shifted dependence from one type of financial assistance (e.g. social assistance) to another (e.g. unemployment insurance).

Findings

Did participants receive less social assistance after the program than before?

We compared the circumstances of 127 participants before and after their involvement with the ERC using project and telephone survey information. In the six months before the project, municipal social assistance was reported as the main (70%) or secondary (20)% source of income. Another 6% (8) reported that their main source of income was unemployment insurance, and 9% (11) cited wages as their primary income source.

In contrast, at the time of the survey, forty-one (49) percent of the 154 respondents reported that their primary source of household income was income assistance, and 14.9% (18) stated that unemployment insurance benefits were their main source of income. Twenty-two percent (27) of participants reported that their primary source of income was from wages.

The result is that a net total of 34 (55 vs. 89) respondents were not dependent on social assistance for their primary source of income after their involvement with the project. A net total of 27 (38 vs. 11) respondents reported wages as their main source of household income.

Pre-project social assistance payments were reported as a mean of $740.94 each month and declined to $241.46 (including those receiving no payment after the project) after the ERC for a difference of $499.48. It should be noted that although participants should be receiving social assistance as a prerequisite to entering the program, only 61 reported receiving payments in the 3 months before the project. This discrepancy is probably a result of a number of factors: recall difficulties; the stigma attached to respondents' acknowledging being part of the social assistance system; or the fact that referrals may be made immediately upon application for social assistance and therefore technically the respondents may have never received monthly payments (i.e. received a training allowances). Whatever the reason for this discrepancy, we assumed all 154 respondents were recipients of social assistance.

The project may, however, have had the unintended effect of shifting dependence from one type of financial assistance (i.e. social assistance) to another (i.e unemployment insurance) for some respondents. Fourteen more respondents (22 vs. 8) reported unemployment insurance as their primary source of income at the time of the survey.

This analysis reveals that the project has reduced dependence on social assistance for participants. An unintended effect may be to shift reliance from one type of financial assistance to another, namely unemployment insurance.

Level of assistance received by comparable population?

An average amount of social assistance received by a comparable population was not available from County files, however this would have involved an extensive manual search of individual files and therefore was not undertaken.

ISSUE 3

Did the Project strengthen the participant's sense of employment readiness?

Conclusion

The Halifax County ERC resulted in an improved sense of employment readiness for most participants. For skills perceived as barriers to employment the project was most successful in improving two specific skills: being interviewed for a job; and writing a resume. The constant support provided by ERC staff was a key factor in increasing a participant's job readiness.

Issue Focus

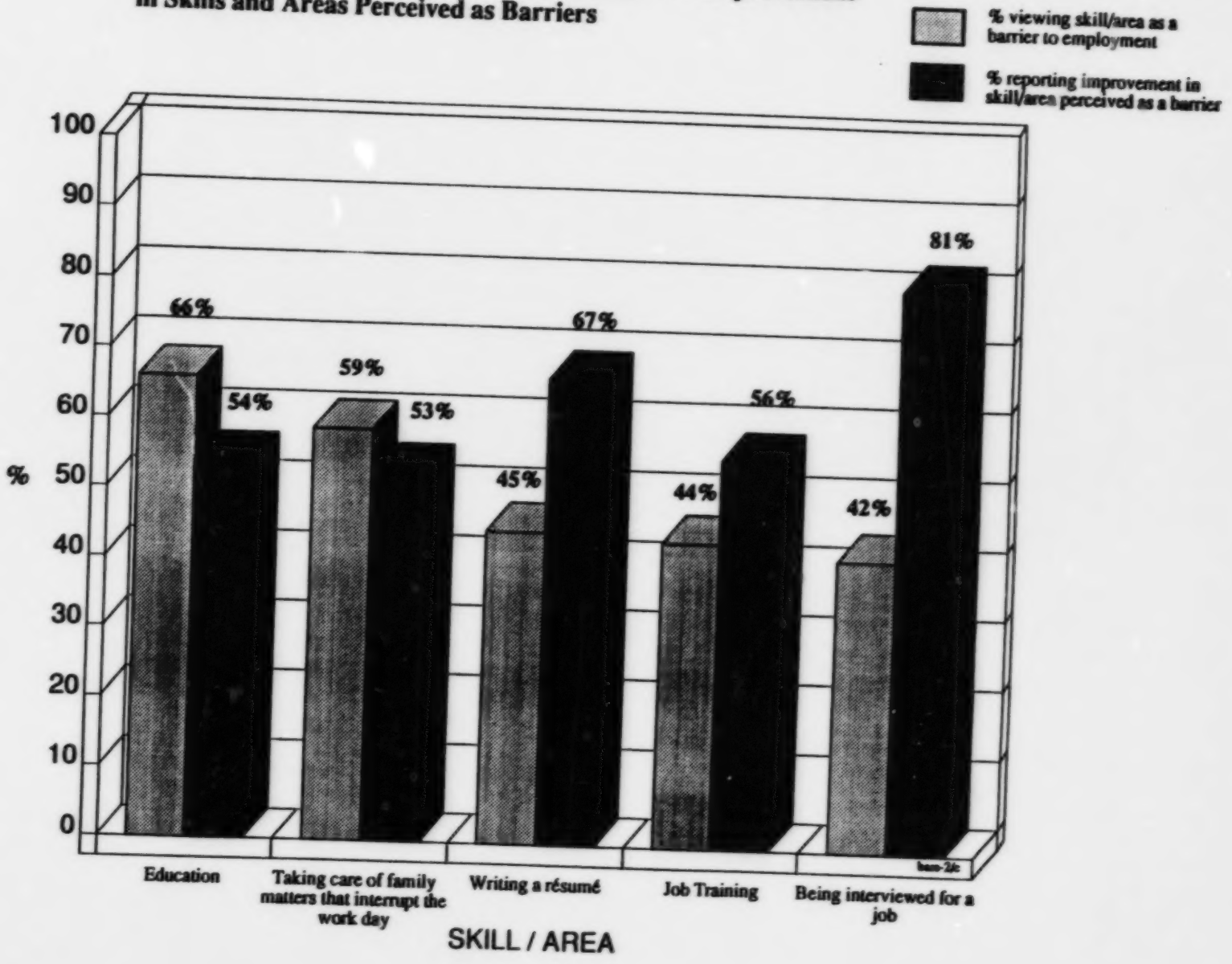
A fundamental concept of employability enhancement projects, is that it is not sufficient to provide a client with skills, it is necessary to change the client's perceptions of his/her own employment readiness. Many of ERC's clients have experienced a series of failures resulting in a negative self-image. By improving or teaching skills in areas perceived as barriers to employment by participants, a client's sense of employment readiness and self-confidence can be improved. In a sense, the objective is to create a type of self-fulfilling prophecy. If a client believes he/she is ready for employment he/she will be more successful in obtaining and maintaining employment.

Findings

Do participants say they feel more ready for employment after completing the program?

We addressed this issue by examining what areas were perceived as barriers to employment by clients and whether the project resulted in a perceived level of improvement for clients. The rationale was that improvement in these areas would result in an improved sense of employment readiness because the

Exhibit 4: Halifax County Employment Resource Centre — Improvement in Skills and Areas Perceived as Barriers



participant's self-confidence would increase.

Our findings are outlined in Exhibit 4, on the opposite page. The bar chart presents the five main areas perceived as barriers to employment or in a central light by participants, and the percentage of these respondents who said the project was helpful in improving the skill or disposition. The percentages are based on responses from participants to whom these services were offered.

Certain skills or aptitudes were perceived by more than 40% of the participants as barriers to employment. Fifty-percent or more of these respondents felt that the project was helpful in improving these skill or dispositions. In particular, 67% of respondents who perceived writing a resume as a barrier to employment felt that their skills had improved in this area. Our discussion under issue six indicates that résumé preparation assistance and job search techniques were viewed as helpful services. The five main areas identified by respondents as barriers were:

- education (66%);
- taking care of family matters that interrupt the work day (59%);
- writing a resume (45%);
- job training (44%); and
- being interviewed for a job (42%).

It should be noted that 81% of participants who viewed being interviewed for a job as a barrier felt that the project had improved their skills in handling an interview. Work experience was viewed as a barrier by 40% of respondents, but the survey did not address this area specifically when examining improved skills.

Understanding what areas are perceived as barriers by the clients is useful to project management in planning training that meets clients needs by directly addressing these perceived barriers. This kind of information is useful in evaluating what components of the project are more or less useful, and what elements are missing. The end result is a project that better addresses the needs of its clientele. For example, work placements are not offered as a formal service of ERC. Project management may want to consider expanding their internal services to address the lack of work experience viewed as a barrier by 40% of respondents.

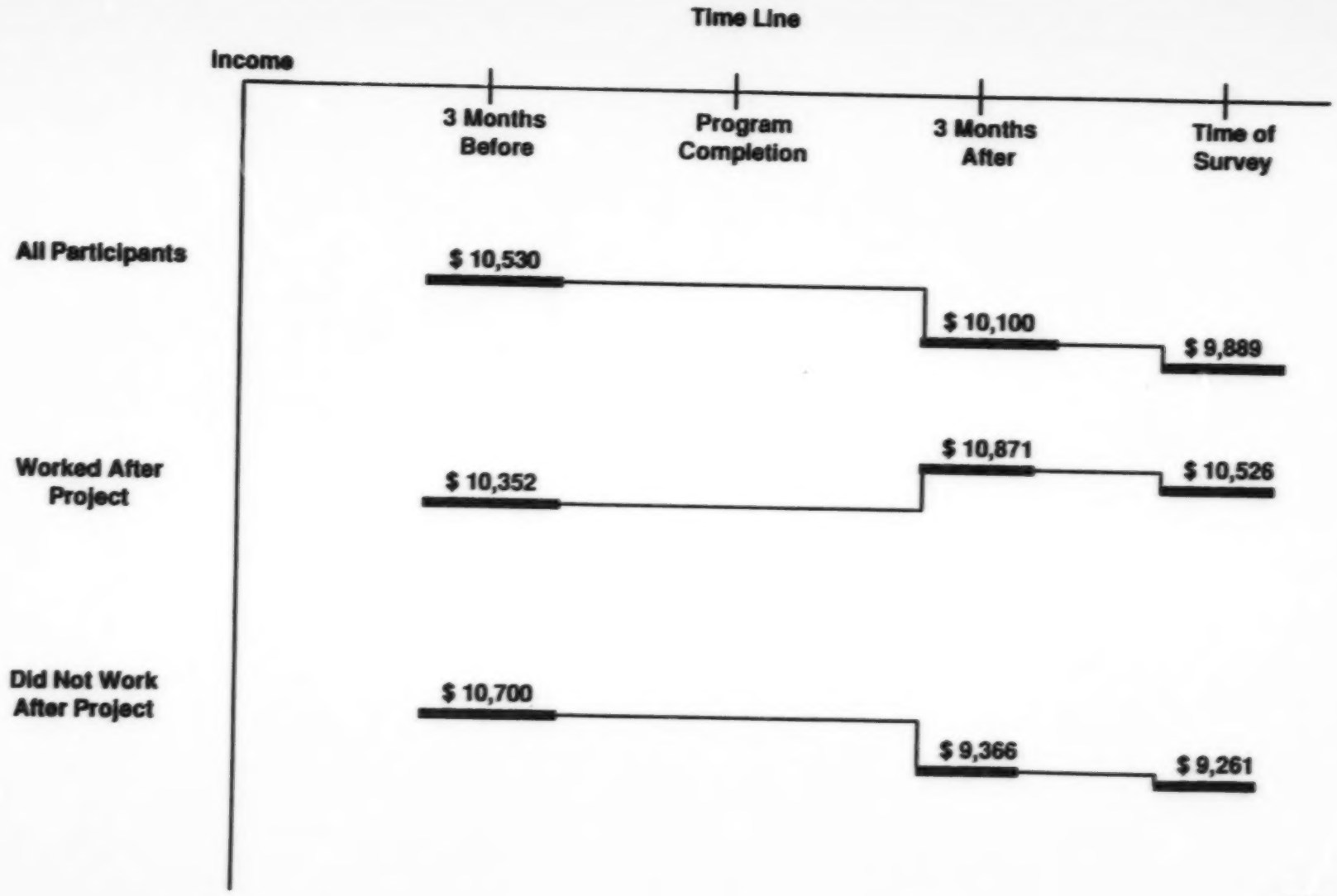
ISSUE 4

Did the project improve the participant's financial situation?

Conclusion

The project did not improve the participants' financial situation. Annual income dropped from $10,530 before the project to $9,889 at the time of the survey. Participants who were employed after the ERC showed a slight increase

Exhibit 5: Changes in the Financial Situation for Employment Resource Centre Participants



in income, however the increase is too small to be significant. Only 37% of respondents reported an improved financial situation.

Issue Focus

This issue addresses another important question and attempts to measure whether real improvements in income have resulted. Although a client may have found and held a job and reduced his/her dependence on social assistance, it is possible that his/her overall standard of living has decreased. Indirectly, this issue attempts to address the questions of quality of life and also attempts to assess whether employment may result in disincentives for clients.

Findings

Do participants report any change in income?

Using survey data, we examined income levels of project participants for three points in time:

- three months before the project;
- three months after the project (where applicable); and
- at the time of the survey.

Exhibit 5, on the opposite page, depicts the income levels reported for these three points in time. Income levels are based on available information and presented for all participants who were employed at some time after the project, and for those were not employed after the ERC.

An examination of the time line reveals that before the project, the mean annual income was $10,530. This figure dropped slightly to $10,100 (a difference of $430) in the 3 months immediately after the project. At the time of the survey, the mean annual income dropped to $9,889 for a difference of $641 from pre-project income levels.

These findings are in keeping with the fact that only 37% of respondents reported that they felt they were better off financially at the time of the survey than in the three months before the project. Given the fact that 32% of respondents were employed at the time of the survey these findings are not surprising. In addition, it is likely that this is linked to the effects of inflation.

We also examined the income levels of participants who worked, and did not work, after their involvement with the ERC. For those participants who were employed at some time after the project, the mean annual income was $10,352 and rose slightly to $10,871 in the three months after the project. At the time of the survey the mean annual income dropped to $10,526 but remained above pre-ERC income levels by a slight margin. Thirty-two (46%) of these 75 participants felt they were better off financially at the time of the survey than in the three months before ERC. Some of this difference in income may be attributable to employment since 51% of these respondents reported wages as

their primary source of income. However, another 25% reported income assistance as their main source of income. It appears then, that overall involvement with ERC has had little direct effect on income for these participants.

In contrast only 20 of 79 respondents who were not employed after their involvement with the ERC reported that they were financially better off at the time of the survey than in the three months before the project. Forty-nine (37) percent of these participants reported social assistance as their primary source of income. A glance at Exhibit 5 indicates a decrease in mean annual income from $10,700 to $9,261 after the project at the time of the survey.

In summary, these findings suggest that involvement with the ERC has, as yet, had little positive impact on the financial situation of participants. It is likely that respondents involved in training/educational projects contributed to this findings since their financial situation likely did not change as a result of the ERC.

ISSUE 5

What were the costs of the program compared to social assistance?

Conclusion

The per capita cost of the ERC was $429.22. Reduced reliance on social assistance has resulted in a difference in monthly payments of $499.48.

Issue Focus

This issue is of central importance to program funders and administrators but is frequently overlooked during the planning process. In times of fiscal restraint it is those projects that can show a positive cost-benefit ratio that will have a competitive edge in applying for funding. Accordingly, when evaluating the ERC this issue was included for analysis.

The detailed calculations for this section are included in Appendix IV.

What is the total cost per participant of the Employment Resource Centre?

The cost per participant was provided by the Research and Development Officer of the Halifax County Department of Social Services. The per capita cost was estimated to be $429.22 and was calculated by dividing the number of participants in 1989 into the annual budget.

At first glance, this per capita cost is markedly lower than most projects. It should be noted that the ERC acts primarily as a referral service and the average length of time participants are involved with the ERC is approximately 10 weeks (based on 1989 figures). Other costs are incurred by projects which provide direct services to the ERC's clients. Calculations involving these costs

are, however, beyond the scope of this project. Caution is warranted therefore, in making comparisons between this project and those that act as direct service providers.

What is the cost of social assistance for each participant?

We relied on survey data to answer this question. Although self-reported data which requires recall of detailed information over a long period of time is not entirely reliable, this information was used because acquisition of Social Services data would have required an extensive manual search of individual files.

Since ERC participants are all recipients of social assistance, in principle all 154 respondents should have reported having received social assistance in the three month period before the ERC. However, not all respondents surveyed reported that they had received social assistance before the project. ERN evaluators decided, based on interviews with project staff, to rely on the fact that all 154 participants received income assistance before the project.

We found that the amount of social assistance reported received by participants declined after involvement with the ERC. The mean amount of social assistance reported received decreased from $740.94 before ERC to $241.46 per month after for a difference of $499.48 each month.

What is the cost of the ERC in terms of social assistance savings?

We estimated the savings in social assistance as the difference in the reported mean amount of social assistance received each month before and after the project. The difference was a savings of $499.48 per month in social assistance payments. Because of the low per capita cost ($429.22) the expected time to recoup the cost of the ERC in terms of social assistance savings was estimated to be slightly less than one month (3.4 weeks). This estimate includes only the cost of the ERC and does not take into account the costs incurred by direct service providers. Obviously, very little time is required to recapture the cost of one ERC session in terms of social assistance savings. The model of a referral service, such as ERC, warrants attention and a more detailed cost-benefit analysis.

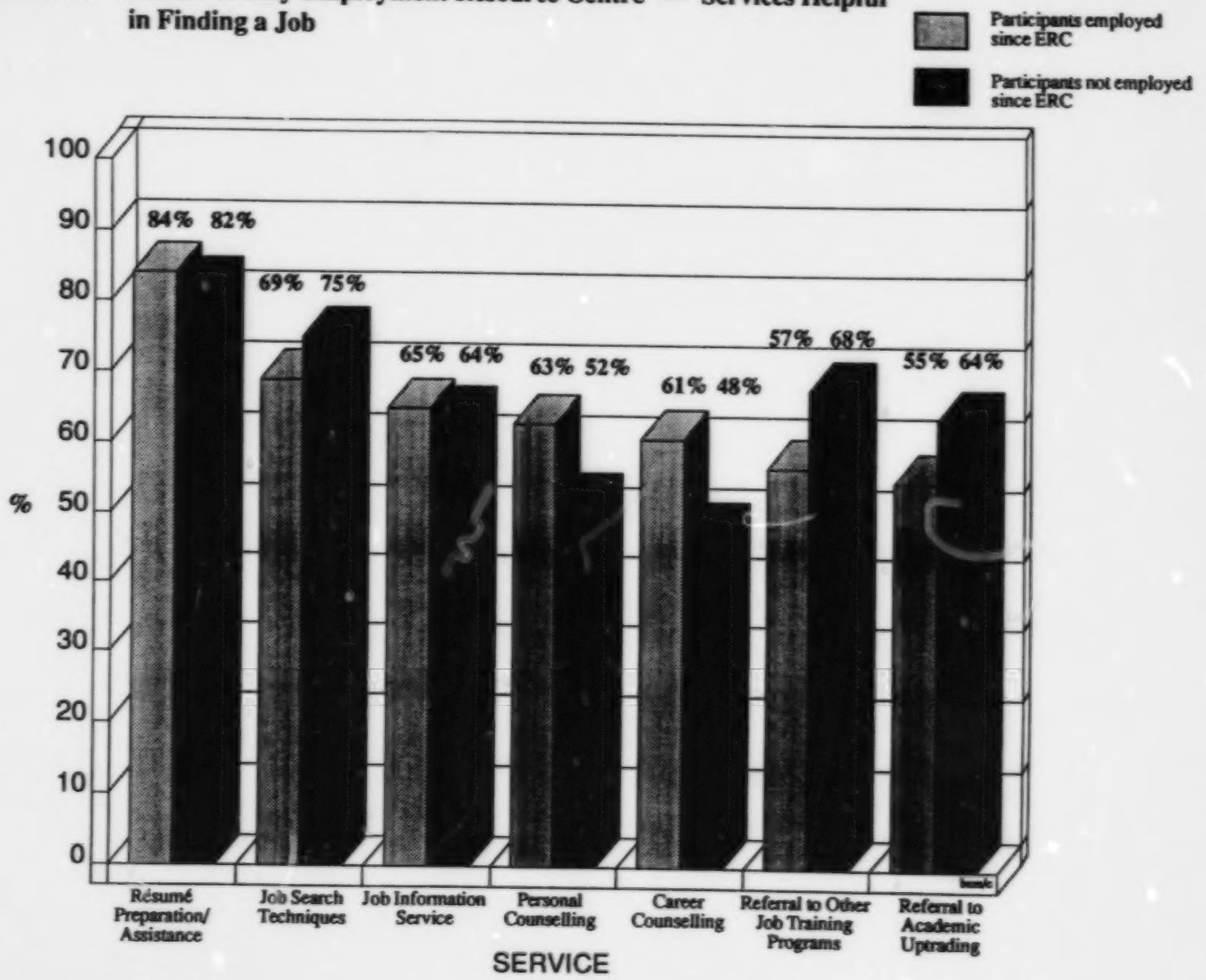
ISSUE 6

What interventions contribute most to increasing employability?

Conclusion

The two services perceived as most helpful in contributing to employability were resume preparation assistance and job search techniques. Job finding clubs were viewed as less helpful by participants, but reduced their sense of isolation and increased their commitment to finding employment.

Exhibit 6: Halifax County Employment Resource Centre — Services Helpful in Finding a Job



Issue Focus

This issue is of vital importance, not only for ERC project management, but for other individuals planning similar projects and for agencies providing funding. It is essential to identify interventions which are the most effective to ensure a maximum utilization of human and monetary resources. An important question for ERC project management is what type of intervention works for whom? This type of information is necessary if projects will continue to improve and meet the needs of their clients.

Findings

What elements of the project training skills do you use in your job?

The available data do not address this question, since most training skills that would be used on the job would be acquired through external services rather than ERC's internal services.

What skills were helpful in finding a job?

In order to answer this question, respondents were divided into two groups: respondents who were employed at the time of the survey or who had been employed at some time since their involvement with the project; and those who had never been employed since the project. Exhibit 6 outlines the services offered by Halifax County ERC and the perceived degree to which each service was helpful in finding a job. The percentages reflect the responses of participants to whom the service was made available.

For most services, at least half the respondents viewed the services as somewhat or very helpful in finding a job. There is very little difference in perception between the two groups. For those respondents who found employment, three services were reported as especially helpful in finding a job: resume preparation techniques (84%); job search techniques (69%); and job information (65%).

Respondents who were not employed since their involvement with the project also reported that resume preparation assistance (82%) and job search techniques (75%) were helpful. In addition, 68% reported that referral to other training programs was helpful to them. This reflects the fact that at least one third of ERC participants were not employment ready and required further training.

We also examined whether males and females, and sole support parents perceived different barriers to employment or experienced differences in the areas they felt the project helped them to improve. There were no major differences in perception.

Which experiences/training were less useful?

As discussed above, most services were perceived as helpful by both groups. However, of those respondents who found employment, less than half who made use of the services felt that family coping skills (41%) or effective parenting (42%) were useful in finding a job. This should not be surprising as the intent of these two services is not employment-related. The family coping skills and effective parenting services are provided primarily to single parents to assist them in more effectively managing their families' lives.

A further finding is that only 43% of respondents who found employment perceived job finding clubs as helpful. This finding is related to the inexperience of staff who ran the job finding clubs during the first year of the project. While the clubs were not always successful in helping with an employment lead, participants indicate that they did play a significant role in maintaining their self-respect and regaining lost confidence. Participants at the focus group suggested that their involvement in the clubs made them realize that they were not alone in their problems. "I drew strength knowing that I wasn't the only one in my position" and "The club gave me a reason to get up in the morning; it was the enthusiasm of other members that helped me get up and going instead of being lazy or discouraged.

Qualitative Findings

This section presents our findings and conclusions as a result of the interviews and focus groups conducted as part of this evaluation.

Strengths of the Employment Resource Centre

The Employment Resource Centre is an interesting approach in Canada that recognizes the worth and value of people who have not had the opportunity to partake fully in society because of problems with finances, family or education.

The key strength of the ERC is the support it receives from Halifax County's social assistance division. A good rapport and understanding exists between the ERC and social assistance staff as reflected in one senior administrator's comment that the ERC goes "hand in hand with social services - it allows the means to mobilize the person to become independent." This support is essential for the ERC staff to carry out their job effectively, allowing them the time to develop a realistic case plan with the individual client rather than being pressured to get the client into any kind of job and off the social assistance caseload. The relationship is seen to work both ways; as one social assistance worker commented, "I couldn't do my casework without the ERC being in place

- I feel good as a caseworker being able to offer the ERC service to a client."

A second strength of the ERC is the existence of a strong resource base located throughout the Halifax-Dartmouth metropolitan area. Because the ERC acts primarily as a referral centre for clients rather than as a direct service centre, the availability and accessibility of services for the ERC client is critical to its success. Staff refer to an entire network of agencies including mental health services, educational institutes, CEC training programs, youth programs, and substance abuse programs.

Staff are finding, however, that fewer training programs exist for men in the metropolitan area than for women. Women, for example, can take advantage of the various entry and re-entry programs established under the Canada Employment Job Strategy Program. Similar programs, however, do not exist for men. The training programs that do exist, typically trades related, have long waiting lists, some as long as two years. This lack of available training programs to which the ERC staff can refer their male clients is a limiting factor in the centre's effectiveness with their male clientele.

A third strength of the ERC is the ability it has, through the staff and the assessment tool, to help identify strength and difficulties experienced by individuals. Through the assessment process a more precise picture of the individual (and family) emerges thus allowing staff to work more accurately with the individual.

In summary, the ERC reaches beyond providing social assistance to the individual. The ERC offers opportunities for self-development and plays a pro-active role in working with clients and their families to set and realize goals.

Areas for Improvement

Staff are concerned that clients have unrealistic expectations relating to the type of employment and wages they can attain through involvement with the ERC. These unrealistic expectations are tied directly to the barriers faced by many of their clientele. Staff estimate that in some isolated areas of Halifax County up to 40% of clients may require literacy training. This points to a need to support and enhance ongoing literacy programs that are already in need. Most training programs are not open to individuals with a formal grade 8 education or less. In order to meet this problem head on, more dollars will be required for the development of literacy programs within the Halifax County and metropolitan area.

ERC staff have identified a second weakness of their operations as being the lack of a trained life skills worker on staff with the centre. Staff recognize that in many instances it is not the client's lack of skills that hold him back

from employment but rather a poor self-image and lack of presentation and communication skills. The ERC is in the process of identifying the necessary finances to staff this position through the County's continuing education department.

Finally, the nature of the SARS funding has affected the ERC's effectiveness. Because it is a cost-shared government program, funding is both limited and tenuous. Limited funding impacts the nature and scope of services the ERC is able to offer their clients; and because funding is tenuous the commitment of staff to the ERC is affected. For example, should a permanent position become available in another jurisdiction, ERC staff are tempted to leave due to the instability of their position.

Summary of Observations

This section summarizes our observations as a result of the qualitative and quantitative findings outlined in the preceding discussion.

1. The Halifax County ERC has limited success in enabling telephone survey respondents to find employment (49%). This success rate is affected by an over-representation of single parents in the survey sample. However, the ERC is successful in assisting participants to identify appropriate training / educational opportunities. The ERC also stabilized participants' employment patterns, in particular reducing reliance on seasonal employment. Sixty-five percent of employed participants continued in their first job.

2. The project reduced dependence on social assistance as the primary source of income. Social assistance payments dropped from $740.94 before ERC to $241.46 for a difference of $499.48. For some respondents dependence may have shifted to unemployed insurance, an unintended effect of the project.

3. The Halifax County ERC resulted in an improved sense of employment readiness for most participants. For skills perceived as barriers to employment the project was most successful in improving two specific skills: being interviewed for a job; and writing a résumé. The constant support provided by ERC staff was a key factor in increasing a participant's job readiness. Lack of work experience was viewed as a barrier by 40% of respondents but work placements were not formally offered by the ERC.

4. The ERC did not result in an improved financial situation for participants. The mean annual income dropped from $10,531 before the project to $9,889 at the time of the service.

   Thirty-seven percent of respondents reported that their financial situation had improved. This figure is low

because respondents involved in training / educational projects likely did not experience any positive change in their situation, and the effects of inflation may have lessened any change in financial situation for all respondents.

5. The two services perceived as most helpful in contributing to employability were résumé preparation assistance and job search techniques. Job finding clubs were viewed as less helpful by participants, but reduced participants' sense of isolation and increased their commitment to finding employment.

6. A key strength of the ERC is the support it receives from Halifax County's social assistance division. This support allows ERC staff time to develop a realistic case plan rather than being pressured to get the client into any kind of job and off the social assistance caseload. Immediate referral to ERC when applying for assistance benefits is a key factor.

7. A second strength of the ERC is the availability and accessibility of services for the ERC client since the ERC acts primarily as a referral centre.

8. Another strength is the fact that ERC staff work with the entire family, rather than simply the individual, lending stability to the client's life.

9. In some isolated areas of Halifax County, staff estimate that up to 40% of clients require literacy training. Since most training programs are closed to individuals with less than a grade 8 reading level, more literacy programs are required.

10. Many clients require lifeskills training and a trained lifeskills worker is not available at the centre due to budgetary constraints.

11. The nature of SARS funding limits the nature of services available through the ERC, and its tenuous nature indirectly results in a high staff turnover. The result is a weakening of the ERC's effectiveness.

5.
RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are intended not as criticisms, but as suggestions for enhancing the Employment Resource Centre's effectiveness. We recognize that some recommendations are beyond the control of project management. However, consideration should be given to incorporating these recommendations in future funding proposals.

Federal/Provincial Governments:

1. The approach taken by the Employment Resource Centre in facilitating the transition of social assistance recipients from dependency to self-sufficiency should continue to be supported by the SARS program and project management. This approach recognizes that the transitional period translates into varying amounts of time for different individuals, and does not pressure ERC staff to push clients into any kind of employment in order to reduce numbers on the social assistance caseload. Success of this project should be measured in terms of the number of participants employed or pursuing further educational / training opportunities.

2. A related recommendation is that the ERC and similar employment enhancement projects be given an explicit mandate to include "quality of life" objectives in their overall employment objective. This recommendation is based on the realization that a high proportion of ERC clients have multiple barriers and are not ready for employment in the short term; but require counselling or pre-employment training to make them job ready.

Project Designers:

3. The ERC has been well integrated into the existing structure of the County Social Assistance System. ERC and social assistance staff work on a team basis with clients and strong communication links preclude disagreements over clients' eligibility for benefits. It is strongly recommended that this team approach be used as a model by similar employment projects.

Specifically for this Project:

4. The evaluation has found that in some isolated areas of Halifax County, as high as 40% of the ERC's clients may require literacy training.

To meet this need, we recommend that ERC project management take a proactive approach to this issue and act as an advocate for the support and enhancement of existing programs.

5. Lack of work experience has been identified as a barrier to employment by a large proportion of clients. We recommend that the project officers target this need during the development of the action plan and make the appropriate referrals.

6. The job finding clubs can be enhanced by drawing from Halifax City's Employment Support Centre (ESC) where such clubs are highly successful. We recommend that project management consult Halifax City Employment Support Centre staff and use its clubs as a model for increasing the effectiveness of the Halifax County Employment Resource Centre's own job finding clubs.

7. We recommend that ERC pursue its efforts to obtain the services of a trained lifeskills worker.

6.
CONCLUSION

The ERC is an innovative approach in Canada that recognizes the worth and value of people who have not had the opportunity to partake fully in society because of personal problems or problems with finances, family or education. The ERC reaches beyond providing social assistance to an individual, offering opportunities for self-development and taking a proactive position to work with clients and their families to set and realize goals.

Through the ERC model, staff refer clients to a wide range of services, agencies and employers in the region. Under this model the project acts as a referral agency rather than as a direct service provider. Participants have indicated that key success factors are the one on one counselling and continuity with the same ERC counsellor throughout their involvement with the project.

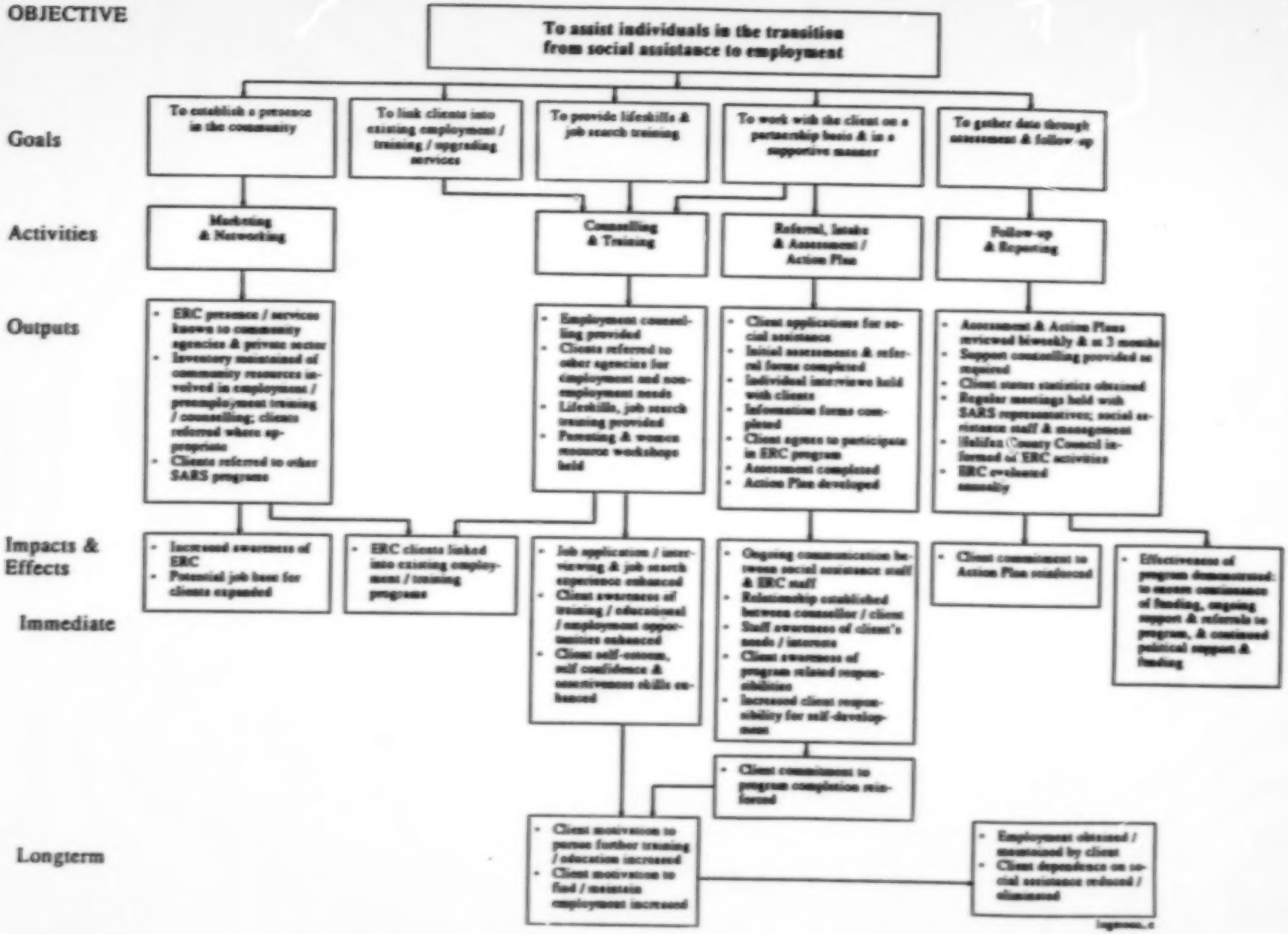
Approximately two-thirds of the ERC clients have found employment or enroled in other training/educational programs since their involvement with the ERC indicating that the project is successful in meeting its objectives although less successful in enabling participants to find employment. An important facet of the ERC is the positive working relationship that has been established between ERC and social assistance staff at the line and management levels.

The project is an interesting model for municipalities that are financially strapped in that it acts as a referral agency rather than a provider of direct services, which is a more costly model to implement. In addition, the model makes effective use of existing services by identifying individual client's needs and directing them to the appropriate agency. Finally, ERC has attempted to fill staff positions with qualifying (i.e. meet job qualifications) former social assistance recipients. This factor, combined with the linkage between the ERC and social assistance staff, alleviates the apprehension experienced by many social assistance recipients when in contact with social services personnel.

APPENDIX I

PROGRAM LOGIC MODEL

EXHIBIT I: HALIFAX COUNTY EMPLOYMENT RESOURCE CENTRE — PROGRAM LOGIC MODEL


OBJECTIVE
To assist individuals in the transition from social assistance to employment
Goals
To establish a presence in the community
To link clients into existing employment / training / upgrading services
To provide lifeskills & job search training
To work with the client on a partnership basis & in a supportive manner
To gather data through assessment & follow-up
Activities
Marketing & Networking
Counselling & Training
Referral, Intake & Assessment / Action Plan
Follow-up & Reporting
Outputs
ERC presence / services known to community agencies & private sector
Inventory maintained of community resources involved in employment / preemployment training / counselling; clients referred where appropriate
Clients referred to other SARS programs
Employment counselling provided
Clients referred to other agencies for employment and non-employment needs
Lifeskills, job search training provided
Parenting & women resource workshops held
Client applications for social assistance
Initial assessments & referral forms completed
Individual interviews held with clients
Information forms completed
Client agrees to participate in ERC program
Assessment completed
Action Plan developed
Assessment & Action Plans reviewed biweekly & at 3 months
Support counselling provided as required
Client status statistics obtained
Regular meetings held with SARS representatives; social assistance staff & management
Halifax County Council informed of ERC activities
ERC evaluated annually
Impacts & Effects
Immediate
Increased awareness of ERC
Potential job base for clients expanded
ERC clients linked into existing employment / training programs
Job applications / interviewing & job search experience enhanced
Client awareness of training / educational / employment opportunities enhanced
Client self-esteem, self confidence & assertiveness skills enhanced
Ongoing communication between social assistance staff & ERC staff
Relationship established between counsellor / client
Staff awareness of client's needs / interests
Client awareness of program related responsibilities
Increased client responsibility for self-development
Client commitment to Action Plan reinforced
Effectiveness of program demonstrated: to ensure continuance of funding, ongoing support & referrals to program, & continued political support & funding
Client commitment to program completion reinforced
Longterm
Client motivation to pursue further training / education increased
Client motivation to find / maintain employment increased
Employment obtained / maintained by client
Client dependence on social assistance reduced / eliminated

APPENDIX II

METHODOLOGY OUTLINE

EXHIBIT 2: METHODOLOGY OUTLINE

Halifax County

Employment Resource Centre

IMPACT / EFFECT ISSUES	RESEARCH QUESTIONS	INDICATORS	AVAILABLE DATA / QUALITY	ADDITIONAL INSTRUMENTS REQUIRED
1. Did the Project assist the participants in: – obtaining employment; – maintaining employment?	R1. How many participants subsequently found work?	• Number of participants working 6 months after completing the program.	• Follow-up data. (H) • As above, although there will be a reduction in the response rate from 3 to 6 months. (H)	
	R2. How many successful participants maintained employment?	• Number of jobs held over six months.	• Follow-up data. (H)	• Survey of participants.
		• Proportion of the 6 months following the program during which participants were employed.	• As above, although there will be a reduction in the response rate from 3 to 6 months. (H)	• Survey of participants.
	R3. Is there a change in employment pattern for successful participants?	• % of six months spent working.	• Same as above.	
		• Length of employment in the 6 months following the program compared to the 6 months preceding the program.	• Same as above. Pre-program information is available on a one year basis only.	• Survey of participants.
	R4. Is the program success rate higher than in a comparable group?	• Time spent on social assistance by type of entrance.	• No data available. • No comparison group available.	

Halifax County
Employment Resource Centre (cont'd)

IMPACT / EFFECT ISSUES	RESEARCH QUESTIONS	INDICATORS	AVAILABLE DATA / QUALITY	ADDITIONAL INSTRUMENTS REQUIRED
2. Did the Project reduce the participants' dependence on social assistance?	R5. Did participants receive less social assistance after the program than before?	• Amount of social assistance received in the 6 months before taking the program compared to the amount received in the 6 months after taking the program. • Differences between successful and unsuccessful participants.	• Assessment form. (L) • Manual search through file cards.	• Survey of participants.
	R6. Level of assistance received by comparable populations?	• Assistance received.	• All people receiving assistance participate in program.	
3. Did the Project strengthen the participants' personal sense of employment readiness?	R7. Do participants say they feel more ready for employment after completing the program?	• Individuals' perceptions regarding obtaining and keeping a job as a result of the program.	• Data not available.	• Survey of participants.
4. Did the Project improve the participants' financial situation?	R8. Do participants report any change in income?	• Participants' perceptions regarding financial status in the 6 months following the program.	• Review of the social assistance and family benefits files.	• Survey of participants.

Halifax County
Employment Resource Centre (cont'd)

COST / BENEFIT ISSUES	RESEARCH QUESTIONS	INDICATORS	AVAILABLE DATA / QUALITY	ADDITIONAL INSTRUMENTS REQUIRED
5. What were the costs of the program compared to social assistance.			• It will be difficult to show an accurate per client cost as there is no set time for clients' involvement with the project. Overall costs can be calculated and an estimate per participant provided. (L)	
	R9. What is the total incremental cost per participant?	• Capitation + CD&E administration cost + Social Services administration cost. • Cost per success = (per capita cost * number of participants) / number of successes.		
	R10. What is the cost of social assistance for each participant?	• Average weekly cost per social assistance recipient in Nova Scotia.	• Provincial Community Services. (H)	
	R11. What is the cost of social assistance for each successful participant?	• Average weekly social assistance cost for successful participants in the 25 weeks following the program.	• County and Provincial Community Services. (H)	
	R12. Number of weeks required to recover the cost of a session from social assistance savings.	• (Per capita cost * average number of participants per session) / (Weekly social assistance savings per success * average number of successes per session).	• County and Provincial Community Services. (L)	

Halifax County
Employment Resource Centre (cont'd)

COST / BENEFIT ISSUES	RESEARCH QUESTIONS	INDICATORS	AVAILABLE DATA / QUALITY	ADDITIONAL INSTRUMENTS REQUIRED
6. What interventions contribute most to increasing employability?	R13. What elements of the project training skills you learned do you use in your job?	• Perceptions of staff and participants.	• Data not available.	• Survey of participants. • Staff interviews. • Focus group.
	R14. Which skills were helpful in finding a job?	• Same as above.	• Data not available.	• Same as above.
	R15. Which expenses / training were less useful?	• Same as above.	• Data not available.	• Same as above.

APPENDIX III

TELEPHONE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE AND INTERVIEW GUIDES

APPENDIX III

TELEPHONE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE AND INTERVIEW GUIDES

GUIDE FOR FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

1. I'd like to start off this evening by going around the room and asking each of you to explain what you think the main purpose of the ERC is; and whether in your opinion it works.

2. Okay, now I'd like to say why you went to the ERC; what you were hoping would happen by going to the ERC; and what happened?

3. What services did each of you receive through the ERC? What do/did you think of these services?

4. Were you looking for other services that weren't available through the ERC? (If yes, what were they?)

5. How long have each of you been involved with the ERC? For those of you who are no longer part of the ERC, in your opinion was your involvement long enough? Is the training long enough?

6. Do you feel more employable (more in control of your life) since you have been involved with the ERC? Why? Why not?

7. What is the most important aspect about your involvement with the ERC? What have you gotten out of it?

8. Are there any other positive aspects of the ERC that we haven't touched on? Any negative aspects?

9. Is there anything that you would change in how the ERC operates in order to better meet people's needs?

10. Any other comments?

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR ERC STAFF

1. What do you see as the purpose of the ERC?

2. Do you see the ERC as offering a real alternative to social assistance recipients? Please explain.

3. Is it working?

4. Who, in your experience, is best suited to the services of the ERC?

5. What is the optimal method for identifying ERC participants?

6. Are the services offered by the ERC appropriate to the needs of the participants? Please explain.

7. Can you identify any additional services that should be offered?

8. What is the optimal relationship between the social assistance workers and the ERC staff and participants?

9. What is the existing relationship between the social assistance workers and the ERC staff and participants?

10. How critical is the assessment process to the eventual success of the participant's involvement in the ERC? Please explain.

11. How critical is the case plan to the eventual success of the participant's involvement in the ERC? Please explain.

12. What kind of ongoing support is provided to the ERC participant while involved in the program? Is this sufficient?

13. What kind of post-program support, if any, should be available to participants once they have left the ERC?

14. What are the three key strengths of the ERC? Please explain.

15. Does the ERC have any weaknesses? If so, can these be changed and how?

16. Do you have any other comments on the effectiveness of the ERC?